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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 003009

SIPDIS

NOFORN

PM FOR AMBASSADOR BODINE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#) [TERFIN](#) [DOMESTIC](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: PM SENIOR ADVISOR BODINE'S 12/17 MEETING WITH
SALEH: U.S. AND SAUDI CT COOPERATION, IRAQ RECONSTRUCTION,
YEMENIS' REJECTION OF "EXTREME" POLITICAL PARTIES

REF: A. SANAA YM IIR 6 906 0004 04/DAGON FIRE

[1](#)B. SANAA 2773

[1](#)C. SANAA 2552

[1](#)D. SANAA 2440

[1](#)E. SANAA 2701

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: In an extended 12/17 meeting with President Saleh, PM Senior Advisor Bodine welcomed U.S.-Yemeni CT cooperation and, along with the Ambassador, requested greater access for U.S. interrogation teams. Supporting U.S. assistance for Yemen's security and development, Ambassador Bodine and the Ambassador calmed Saleh's concerns with the December visit of an Export and Border Security (EXBS) team to the Haradh border crossing point. Saleh and Ambassador Bodine also exchanged views on Iraq and former Secretary Baker's successful efforts on debt rescheduling. Saleh briefed on the advanced status of the Saudi-Yemeni border demarcation. Ambassador Bodine's meeting with FM Qirbi will be reported septel. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) PM Senior Advisor Ambassador Barbara Bodine, accompanied by the Ambassador, DCM and Pol/Econ Chief (notetaker) called on President Saleh on December 17 during Bodine's 2-day stay in Yemen. The meeting lasted an hour and forty-five minutes.

SALEH: SAUDI CT COOPERATION IS NOT A PRECEDENT FOR U.S. ACCESS TO DETAINEES

[1](#)3. (S/NF) In response to Ambassador Bodine's question about developments on the CT front, Saleh cited to the recent apprehension of Abu Asim (refs a and b), and the rolling up of "3 or 4 cells" related to al-Qaida. He noted there has been no recent violence and that "tribal kidnapping is over." He gave a brief overview of the al-Sharif cell's proposed targets (refs c and d), which included the British and Italian Embassies, the French cultural center, ROYG officials and buildings, as well as the American Ambassador. He said that most importantly, "those arrested had all graduated from holy Mecca," and included one Yemeni-American and ten Saudis. Saleh claims that Yemen has gotten ten suspects from the Saudis, 8 of them Yemeni, and has requested four more.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Saleh said Yemen has focused on stopping terrorist financing and that cutting off financial resources has noticeably improved things. He then said that when the ROYG got names from Abu Asim, they invited Saudi officials to Yemen. Both Ambassador Bodine and the Ambassador strongly advocated that Yemen should accord the same privileged access to U.S. experts. Saleh stated that on December 16 he gave instructions to ORCA to see key detainees, including Hadi Dulqum, in order to "clear up any doubts" that they were in custody and immediately got on the phone with Presidential Security Office (PSO) Chief General Gamish to confirm that the visits had taken place. Both Ambassadors pointed out that this was not the same as approval for appropriately trained U.S. experts to directly interrogate the detainees. Saleh insisted that the Saudi situation is different because of the flow of money from Saudi Arabia and that the Saudi officials only got information and were not permitted to directly question the detainees. Following a second call to Gamish, Saleh explained that the information provided to the Saudis concerned Abdo Abdullah al-Khatani and a possible terrorist attack at a wedding in Saudi Arabia. He suggested that if the U.S. wants information, it should give the questions to the PSO in writing. He later amended this and said the U.S. could submit questions to the detainees related to "threats to the U.S. or terrorist elements in Yemen" and the ROYG would relay their answers.

[1](#)5. (S/NF) The Ambassador pointed out that the arrest and questioning of Saddam Hussein produced information that led to arrests of more militants, which prevented further terrorism and saved lives. Saleh claimed that Saddam is a totally different situation because of the U.S. occupation. He continued that the U.S. can have information, through the PSO, that relates to "U.S. interests, headquarters, citizens

or employees," but that he will not permit the direct U.S. interrogation of any Yemeni. The Ambassador raised the issue of Abu Asim -- the ROYG insisted he was in al-Jowf, but the Ambassador told Saleh and PSO that Abu Asim was in Sana'a, which was correct and resulted in his arrest (ref e). Saleh acknowledged good U.S.-Yemen cooperation, but complained that U.S. demands equated to U.S. interference in Yemeni internal affairs.

16. (S/NF) Saleh berated the Ambassador for "provoking" him and protested that there is a military guard for the U.S. Embassy compound, but not one soldier in front of the Yemeni Embassy in Washington. The Ambassador reasoned that there should be a practical way to meet the interests of both sides without violating the Yemeni constitution and cited a number of countries, including Pakistan, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, where we were able to find an acceptable solution. Saleh agreed that the issue could be discussed, but emphasized that Yemen is "not under U.S. mandate" and that it would deal with the U.S. on its own terms. He said that cooperation should be done under the auspices of an agreement and complained that Yemen submitted a working paper/security MOU to Washington that was rejected. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. has already gone beyond the terms of any proposed MOU.

17. (S/NF) Saleh was upset by the Export and Border Security (EXBS) team's visit to Haradh on December 7. He claimed that members of the team demanded to see passports and lists of names to know exactly who was crossing back and forth from Yemen to Saudi Arabia. (Note: The team did not inspect either passports or any lists, as far as we know. End note.) Both Ambassadors assured him that the purpose of the program is to strengthen border security. The visit was only to assess what procedures are already in place and to determine what technical assistance the U.S. could best provide. Saleh retorted that the visit was done in a "provoking manner" and that the region is a "pit of terror" that Yemen is trying to keep calm. He continued to insist that Yemen welcomes training and equipment, but that he would prefer to sign an MOU regarding the exchange of information. Even when confronted with the facts that the MFA had helped arrange the trip and that the team was accompanied by Yemeni officials, Saleh's response was that Yemen cooperates with the U.S. "like no one else in the region or world," but the U.S. administration provides only promises. He again said he would not be provoked and that the U.S. needs to stop its "internal intervention."

18. (S/NF) Turning to the issue of money, Saleh railed that Yemen got \$20 million for vehicles, and that it was promised \$21 million if Abu Asim was arrested. He complained that there are now additional conditions and that the U.S. is attempting to renegotiate terms. Both Ambassadors assured him that the U.S. is not trying to bargain, but Saleh interrupted that FBI Director Mueller promised a \$5 million reward for Jaber al-Banna and that he is now being told that the reward is only for American citizens. (Comment: Director Mueller made no/no such promise during his visit to Sana'a.) Ambassador Bodine said that assistance and cooperation are both part of an on-going process and highlighted the increased programming for security, military and political cooperation since her departure over two years ago.

19. (S/NF) Saleh expressed deep dissatisfaction with what he characterized as the United States, lack of recognition of Yemen's counter-terrorism accomplishments and complained that he has not heard "thank you." In response, the Ambassador said "thank you" in Arabic several times. He also asked whether Saleh had been briefed on the three U.S. planes that recently arrived carrying supplies and equipment for the Central Security Forces (CSF), the PSO, and the Presidential Guard and whether Deputy Prime Minister Sofan had told him of the progress on a 416(b) agreement for dry milk products. Saleh dismissed the 416(b) plan, but both Ambassadors encouraged him to reserve judgment. Saleh bragged that the ROYG is the "police force of the region" and bemoaned U.S. "stinginess," but promised to maintain the level of security even if cooperation were to cease.

10. (S/NF) Towards the end of the meeting, Saleh said he would like to see greater transparency, and denied that he was trying to "twist arms," calling such an approach undemocratic. The Ambassador noted that there are problems in every important U.S. bilateral relationship. He explained that we will continue to ask for more cooperation, but that it will be done in an appropriate way that will not create problems for Yemen, and that we will continue to try to expand our support for development, cultural and security cooperation. Saleh reiterated his request for transparency and praised the idea of fruitful cooperation based on mutual trust, saying without trust, cooperation is meaningless. He said "we are ready" and asked both Ambassadors to carry back the correct impression, closing with the observation that "the problem with the Europeans is that they are not like the Americans, who are open and frank." Ambassador

Bodine echoed this sentiment and reassured Saleh that his candor is appreciated and that trust and honesty is important for a healthy relationship. Saleh said only the future will tell, but Ambassador Bodine noted that the past is a good guide.

SALEH ON IRAQ: U.S. Should "Distribute the Cake" to France and Germany

11. (C) Saleh inquired about Ambassador Bodine's involvement in Iraq. She commented on strong Iraqi efforts to rebuild their country. Saleh said that if the situation improves, it will be good for the U.S., but if it worsens, it will be the responsibility of the U.S. administration. Expressing confidence that the situation will improve, Ambassador Bodine commented that some Iraqis were afraid that Saddam would return and that with his capture the Iraqi people can now begin to look to the future, not over their shoulder to the past. Calling former Secretary James Baker a friend, Saleh noted the success of his trips to Germany and France and said that the U.S. should "distribute the cake" and reconsider giving France and Germany a role in Iraq's reconstruction.

12. (C) Citing Oman and Bahrain, Saleh referred positively to the region's gradual steps toward democracy and said that Oman is taking "smart" steps to quell unjustified fears about democratic elections. He noted Yemen's progress on local councils since 2001, and cited the fact that there were 7,000 candidates "from every village" this time around. He said that the recent local council by-elections for 92 seats yielded 8 seats for Islah and 4 seats for YSP. He also said that the GPC reclaimed 19 seats formerly held by Islah and that this represents the public's rejection of Islamic extremists. (Comment: Islah is Islamist but not all elements are extremist. Its leadership encompasses a broad spectrum that includes both moderate and extreme elements. End comment.)

13. (C) Ambassador Bodine commented that it is important to maintain balance in the system and that the GPC would lose credibility if it captured 99.5 percent of the vote. Saleh acknowledged the point and said that the GPC wants others to participate and advocates complete transparency. He joked that Islah always claims that they know the election results in advance - if they win, it should have been by more; if they lose, it was rigged, but there is always an excuse at the ready for any outcome. He reiterated that Yemenis are not happy with the more radical/extremist parties and noted that the socialists left a poor legacy by pushing for separation and expounding bad economic policy. He said that he has called on the opposition parties to form a joint forum and provided financial support for its formation, an effort he claims is aimed at making sure the ruling party (GPC) does not get 99.5% of the vote.

YEMEN-SAUDI BORDER DEMARCATION IN FINAL STAGES

14. (C) Saleh said that they are finalizing the technical review of the Yemen-Saudi land border. He claims that Yemen has spent \$1.1 billion on the project, which is being done by a German company and a Lebanese sub-contractor.

COMMENT: SALEH'S PUBLIC FACE DOES NOT ALWAYS MIRROR HIS PRIVATE MESSAGE

15. (S/NF) Comment: Some of Saleh's blustering about provocation may have been posturing for his advisors and others in the room (there was one ringer later identified as a Nassarite "cultural" advisor). Iryani tried to give us a heads up at the start of the meeting asking Ambassador Bodine if she had a "private message" for the President. We missed the hint. Had the meeting taken place in private or with fewer participants, Saleh may have been more willing to admit that U.S.-Yemen CT cooperation has, in spite of its successes, not yet fully evolved and has room for improvement. Clearly recognizing that the tone of the meeting was more confrontational than the situation warranted, Presidential Advisor Abdelkarim al-Iryani (who was present at the meeting) called Ambassador Bodine on December 18 to apologize on behalf of President Saleh and reiterate Yemen and Saleh's confidence in the fundamental strength of the relationship. End Comment.

16. (U) This cable was cleared by Ambassador Bodine.

HULL